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IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

## WHAT IS CLAIMED:

1. (currently amended) A system for selectively blocking email messages sent by a sender over a communications network to a recipient without requiring prior communication between the sender and the recipient, comprising

a recipient message handler for receiving email messages from senders,

at least one recipient permitted sender database (PSD) for storing sender information associated with senders authorized by the recipient,

at least one recipient group Permitted Sender Database (PSD) for storing sender information associated with senders authorized by at least one ~~all~~ members of a recipient group of which the recipient is a member, and

a validation processor for determining whether an email message sent by the sender is authorized by comparing sender information in an the email message received from a the sender with corresponding sender information stored in the recipient PSD and the recipient group PSD, and forwarding or making accessible the email message to the recipient if the sender information

~~—whereby when sender information in an email message sent by a sender matches the corresponding sender information stored in the recipient PSD or the recipient group PSD, the email message is forwarded or made accessible to the recipient, otherwise the email message is not forwarded or made accessible to the recipient or if the sender information does not match the sender information stored in the recipient PSD and the recipient group PSD, the email message is not forwarded,~~

whereby the decision to forward the email message is determined by the sender having been authorized by either the recipient or the at least one member of the recipient group of which the recipient is a member.

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2. (original) The system of claim 1 wherein when the sender information in an email message sent by a sender does not match corresponding sender information stored in the recipient PSD but does match sender information stored in the recipient group PSD, the sender information is added to the recipient PSD.
3. (original) The system of claim 1 wherein the sender information comprises a sender email address.
4. (original) The system of claim 3 wherein the sender information comprises a sender message handler Internet Protocol (IP) address.
5. (original) The system of claim 4 wherein when the sender's message handler internet protocol (IP) address does not match the message handler internet protocol (IP) address previously associated with that sender, the sender's message is held.
6. (original) The system of claim 1 wherein when sender information in an email message sent by a sender does not match corresponding information stored in the recipient PSD or the recipient group PSD the email message is held for a preset hold interval and a message is sent to the sender with directions for completing a permission request form for submission to the recipient.
7. (original) The system of claim 6 wherein where the recipient does not add the sender to the recipient PSD before the preset hold interval expires, after the preset hold interval the sender's email message is automatically deleted.
8. (original) The system of claim 6 wherein where the recipient does not add the sender to the permitted sender database the sender's email message is deleted.
9. (original) The system of claim 7 wherein when the recipient adds a sender to the recipient PSD an email message is automatically sent to the sender notifying the sender of the addition of the sender to the recipient PSD.
10. (original) The system of claim 8 wherein an email message is automatically sent to the sender notifying the sender of the refusal to add the sender to the permitted sender database.

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11. (currently amended) A method of selectively blocking email messages sent by a sender over a communications network to a recipient without requiring prior communication between the sender and the recipient comprising the steps of:

- a. storing in a recipient PSD sender information associated with senders authorized by the recipient,
- b. storing in a recipient group PSD sender information associated with senders authorized by at least one other recipient group member in a recipient group of which the recipient is a member,
- c. receiving an email message from ~~a~~ the sender,
- d. comparing sender information in the email message received from the sender with corresponding sender information stored in the recipient PSD to determine if the sender has been authorized by the recipient, and if the sender has not been authorized by the recipient, comparing sender information in the email message received from the sender with corresponding sender information stored in the recipient group PSD to determine if the recipient group has authorized the sender~~and the recipient group PSD,~~ and
- e. ~~forwarding the email message to the recipient only if the sender has been authorized by the recipient sender information in the email message matches the corresponding sender information stored in the recipient PSD or the recipient class group PSD forwarding the email message to the recipient, or~~  
if the sender has not been authorized by either the recipient or the recipient group, not forwarding the email message.

12. (original) The method of claim 11 including, when the sender information in an email message sent by a sender does not match corresponding sender information stored in the recipient PSD but does match sender information stored in the recipient group PSD, the step of adding the sender information to the recipient PSD.

13. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein in step d. the sender information comprises a sender email address.

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14. (original) The method of claim 13 wherein in step d, the sender information comprises a sender message handler Internet Protocol (IP) address.
15. (original) The method of claim 14 wherein if the sender's message handler internet protocol (IP) address does not match the message handler internet protocol (IP) address previously associated with that sender, the sender's message is held.
16. (original) The method of claim 11 including after step d., when sender information in an email message sent by a sender does not match corresponding information stored in the recipient PSD or the recipient class PSD, the steps of holding the email message for a preset hold interval and sending a message to the sender with directions for completing a permission request form for submission to the recipient.
17. (original) The method of claim 16 including, where the recipient fails to add the sender to the recipient PSD before the preset hold interval expires, the step of deleting the sender's email message automatically after the preset hold interval.
18. (original) The method of claim 16 including, where the recipient does not add the sender to the recipient PSD, the step of deleting the sender's email message.
19. (original) The method of claim 17 including, when the recipient adds a sender to the recipient PSD, the step of forwarding an email message to the sender notifying the sender of the addition of the sender to the recipient PSD.
20. (original) The method of claim 18 including the step of notifying the sender that the recipient did not add the sender to the permitted sender database.